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SUBJECT: THE ELECTION PROCESS IN THE CAR - A WORK IN PROGRESS

REF: A 09 BANGUI 275

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The electoral prospectus for the 2010 Central African (CAR) presidential and legislative elections was announced by electoral authorities last month, but with a tight schedule and continuing violence in many parts of the country, the CAR will face many challenges in meeting the timeline. Some of the tests include: conducting a thorough and transparent electoral census, a shortfall in financial resources and national infrastructure, and assuring the inclusion of the large number of internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees in the process. The international community is also working to increase the participation of women as candidates. While the Central African Government (CARG) has committed publically to holding timely, free, and transparent elections, a lack of resources and a questionable political will may exclude many Central Africans from participating in the democratic process. END SUMMARY.

Electoral Timeline

12. (SBU) On December 17, 2009 the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) announced the following electoral timetable for the Central African Republic:

-- Electoral census - December 28, 2009 to February 7, 2010
-- Filing and examination of candidate applications - March 6 to March 20
-- Election Campaign - April 3 to 16
-- First round of presidential and legislative elections - April 18
-- Second round (if needed) - May 23
-- Proclamation of the results on June 7, 2010

Some significant international partners such as France and the European Commission (EC) question the feasibility of the implementation of the electoral timetable (Ref A), but the IEC has confirmed that the timeline, while certainly ambitious, is workable and stressed that the plan was approved by a consensus of all parties to the IEC.

Election Hurdles

¶3. (SBU) The IEC recently reported that some of the 2005 electoral voter lists, long thought to have been lost, were found in an abandoned government building. The discovery of the lists at this late date has sparked some concern over whether or not the rolls were actually 'found' or if new lists - favorably to the CARG - had been created. Rumors and accusations have been circulating, claiming that the government is engaging village chiefs and mayors - who are appointed by the President - to clandestinely prepare electoral lists favorable to the ruling KNK party. To address these concerns, the IEC stated that all lists as well as the processes used to create the lists would be thoroughly reviewed before being certified.

¶4. (U) Regardless, with the discovery of the new rolls, a debate over the elector census has begun in earnest. With the alleged 2005 lists in hand, the President of the IEC is calling for a simple updating of the lists, instead of the scheduled electoral census. IEC opposition members, however, have objected and insist on a full, transparent electoral census with the assistance of the international community. (Note: The opposition defacto only represents one-sixth of the IEC. End Note) Although Regional Coordinators and IEC staff deployed on

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December 28 to the various prefectures of the republic, we are waiting to see if they perform a full census or simply update the 'discovered' lists. With a condensed timeline, a lack of resources, and an estimated 1.8M eligible voters to be registered, Post suspects that only a simple update to the 2005 lists will take place.

¶5. (SBU) Within the problem of creating the electoral lists resides the quandary of how to include IDPs and refugees. International partners and the opposition continue to raise the need to include the 162,000 IDPs and 130,000 refugees - who represent 8 percent of the population - in the electoral process. The IEC is investigating the possibility of organizing voter registration at IDP locations throughout the country, but acknowledges the logistical hurdles in doing so. In addition, the IEC is discussing the enfranchisement of refugees living in Chad, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Republic of the Congo. CAR consulates within these countries will probably not be able to assist with voter registration of refugees in any meaningful way given their lack of resources and ambition to assist voters likely hostile to the current government.

¶6. (SBU) The opposition continues to demand that the government create an environment conducive for the return of refugees and IDPs, but observers are not optimistic on this count as the prefectures most affected by displacement and insecurity are exactly those that are least likely to vote for Bozize. Thus, with just three and a half months remaining before the elections and with insecurity still widespread throughout the regions that has produced IDPs and refugees, it seems unlikely that these people will play a major role in the ballot.

¶7. (U) The involvement of women in the 2010 elections is also a priority for the international community, although Central African women historically have not played a large role in public life. Currently less than 10 percent of the Deputies to the National Assembly are female. In order to encourage the participation of women in the political process, the UN and other donors are taking the following steps:

-- The UN's Office for Central Africa (BONUCA) financed a training session for 35 potential female candidates last month
-- The UNDP is hiring a Gender Expert to increase participation of women in the electoral process and to recruit women into the electoral staff.
--The Association of Women Lawyers (AFJ) plans to conduct election monitoring for the 2010 ballot.
--A local women rights lobbying group, Group of 23, has called for a 30 percent quota for seats for female representatives in the National Assembly.

While it is unlikely that this target will be met, their initiative is an important step. Women's groups have historically played a key role in the Central African elections by providing voter education and election monitoring.

18. (SBU) Regional and municipal elections, scheduled by law for this ballot, increasingly appear to be an afterthought in the minds of the IEC. In the electoral timeline announced by the IEC, there is no mention of regional and municipal elections. As a result, Post worries that the CARG will continue the standard practice of having the President appoint mayors and town council members.

19. (SBU) COMMENT: Although the Bozize administration and IEC have reiterated their commitment to timely, transparent, and inclusive elections, the uncertainty surrounding the electoral

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census and participation of refugees and IDPs remains a concern. Post will endeavor over the following months, in conjunction with other observers, to discern legitimate excuses over resources and logistical challenges from a lack of will on the part of the authorities to provide enfranchisement to qualified Central Africans. END COMMENT.
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